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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Return RC

XGDS-4

DATE: August 10, 1978

PARTICIPANTS: Emilio Mignone, Vice President, Permanent
Assembly for Human Rights (PADH)
F. Allen Harris, Political Officer, *Y*
American Embassy, Buenos Aires

PLACE: Buenos Aires Restaurant

SUBJECT: Mignone's Trip and Human Rights Developments
in Argentina

DISTRIBUTION: AMB, DCM, POL3, POLR, DAO
ARA:Mr. Lister, ARA/ECA:Mr. Bumpus,
HA/HR:Ms. Cohen, INR/RAR:Mr. Buchanan,
OIL/ORPA:Mr. Weissman, DOD/ISA:Mr. Thomas

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Emilio Mignone had just returned to Argentina after an extensive trip through the United States, Central America and Europe. During the two-hour luncheon the following topics were discussed:

Inter-American Human Rights Commission (IAHRC) Visit

Mignone said that he had spent time in Washington with the IAHRC's Aguilar, Vargas, and Moyer. Aguilar portrayed the IAHRC meeting with Montes on the Argentine visit as a stand-off. Aguilar told Mignone that at the conclusion of Montes' presentation extending a limited invitation to the IAHRC to visit Argentina to verify that the legal and juridical system protected human rights, Aguilar informed Montes that the terms for a visit were unacceptable. Montes stated that he would prefer not to reply to the Commission now but would instead refer the matter to Buenos Aires for further consideration. Mignone said when he left Washington several weeks ago the Commission had still not receive a reply from the GOA.

Aguilar told Mignone that he expected the GOA to delay replying in the hope of gaining time. However, Aguilar emphasized that from now on the primary focus of the

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Commission would be on Argentina. Mignone noted that at the Commission's offices he had seen a room filled two boxes deep with letters and information regarding Argentina.

Mignone said he would formally propose that the PADH submit the 3,000 plus signed testimonials in its files to the IAHR for inclusion in the Commission's study. Mignone also mentioned that during his travels, he had obtained funding to pay for the travel of witnesses from Argentina to appear before the IAHR.

Mignone's Presentation

Mignone said he had made the same basic presentation during his trip. He had referred to the May 17 LA PRENSA list of 2,505 disappeared cases and had indicated that the Permanent Assembly had another 500 disappearance cases on hand. (Note: These cases were forwarded to the Ministry of Interior on August 8.) He expressed his personal opinion that the number of cases registered with the Permanent Assembly represented only a fraction of the actual disappearance cases. He then pointed out examples from towns where he had close ties. His home town of Lujan with a population of 70,000 people had 18 disappearance cases but only six had been registered at the Assembly. The neighboring town of Mercedes which had about the same population had 22 disappearance cases but only seven were registered. In Bahia Blanca, of the 25 disappearance cases he knew of, only three were listed with the Assembly.

Mignone had stressed the large number of people affected in Argentina. In addition to a conservative estimate of 15,000 disappeared persons, there were 3500 PEN prisoners plus another 30,000 persons who he estimated had been picked up, questioned, and released by Argentine authorities. The total was approximately 50,000 persons who had been affected by the anti-subversive effort. But, he asserted, by the government's own admission only 800 of these individuals had been sentenced--less than 2 percent of his figure. Mignone concluded that these dramatic figures demonstrated that there was a concerted government policy to process anti-subversive suspects outside of the normal judicial procedures.

Mignone stated flatly that he has seen no progress in 1978 on the major human rights issues in Argentina: 1) information about the disappeared; 2) suspension of "midnight operations"; 3) charging or freeing PEN prisoners and 4) improving jail conditions.

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Mignone's Trip--The United States

Mignone described his visits with State Department, White House, and congressional officials. He was very pleased that he had been widely received by Administration officials in Washington. He noted that WOLA had been very helpful during his Washington visit. His meeting with three or four Congressmen (including Congressman Harkin) and five or six congressional staffers on Argentina had been useful. He also met with members of the United States Catholic Conference regarding improving communications between the U.S. and Argentine churches. He also discussed with NAS and AAAS officials ways in which U.S. doctors and scientists participating at the October Cancer Conference could demonstrate their concern regarding the human rights situation in Argentina.

In New York he met with ADL's Latin American representative, Rabbi Rosenthal; Wiffler of the National Council of Churches; Brady Tyson at USUN, and a number of human rights activists. He said that he was most impressed with a group of young lawyers working on a grant from the Ford Foundation to document cases for presentation to the United Nations from Argentina and other problem countries. Mignone met with officials of the Argentine Information Service Committee who had been receiving support from this Ford Foundation group. Mignone noted that the AISC received a considerable amount of information from the Montoneros and he suspected the AISC may have received money as well. AISC members were trying to build up leadership and participation from the Argentine professional community in New York and move away from any ties with the Montoneros.

Mignone's Trip--The Netherlands

During his trip to Netherlands, Mignone met with seven or eight parliamentarians, Catholic organizations, such as Solidat and the Commission for Missions. These latter two organizations receive funding from the government, but are responsible for its distribution. While there he saw a special screening of the two-hour Dutch television program on Argentina. He noted that the Argentine Embassy had strongly protested the programs and had asked for a copy of the film. This had been turned down by the Dutch TV stations. He said this would be reassuring to the Assembly members and Mothers who had been filmed.

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Mignone's Trip--Belgium and Montonero Attempt to Set Up Meeting

In Belgium Mignone met with Catholic and refugee organizations.

During his stay in Brussels, he was phoned by a representative of the Montoneros who requested a meeting. Mignone said he turned the Montonero's offer down flat and emphasized that any false Montonero claim that such a meeting had taken place would not only hurt him, but also the Permanent Assembly.

Mignone stressed to me that his trip was personal and that he had received no funding or specific support for the trip from the Permanent Assembly. However, during his trip, he could not deny that he was Vice President of the Assembly.

Mignone's Trip--London

Patricia Finney, Amnesty International Latin American Coordinator spent a lot of time with Mignone in London. Mignone said the highlight of his visit to London was a 1:00 AM meeting in the House of Commons with Foreign Ministry State Secretary Rowlands. During this meeting, Rowlands expressed disappointment that the British Embassy in Buenos Aires was not doing more on the right of option refugee program. Rowlands had said that he would have a special officer detailed to Buenos Aires to deal with human rights. Rowlands added that the labor government would loosen the criteria for refugee right of option visas to the UK. Previously, a person had to have some clear and prior relation with the UK, such as a British grandmother or having studied at a British School. Now, the labor government would consider an offer of sponsorship by Amnesty or other humanitarian group as sufficient basis to grant the detainee a visa. Mignone raised the arms sale issue directly with Rowlands. Rowlands said the British were trying to sell some frigates to Argentina which certainly could not be used for human rights violations and did help the UK's balance of payments. When Mignone countered with the fact that the British ships could be used to take the Malvinas, Rowland laughed heartily.

Mignone also met in London with David Steffen, Assistant to Foreign Minister Owen, members of the Joint Group for Latin American Refugees, Catholic organizations and Lord Avenbury, who headed the Amnesty study mission to Argentina.

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Mignone's Trip--Geneva

Mignone's meetings with the UN Human Rights staff underscored the Geneva-based organization's slow and ponderous bureaucracy. The staff's judgment was that although Argentine Ambassador Martinez performed very badly in the meetings; he was very good in the corridors. Martinez was described as an expert log roller--swapping votes for support on human rights issues with other countries for Argentine support for their particular national issues. There was serious concern that there would not be a quorum for the scheduled Working Group Meeting on Argentina.

The UN staffers noted that Liliana Mazzafera (a Montonero) was a major source of information to the UN Commission. She had done an excellent job of presenting well-documented cases for the Commission's consideration. Mignone noted that the UN staff felt that they had less real power to get things done than did the Inter-American Human Rights Commission. He noted that the US representative was thought to be good.

Mignone said he had a good, but not exciting, meeting with the Red Cross representatives. He said that he had found his conversations with the UNHCR more useful. Leonardo Franco, an Argentine on the staff, and the High Commission's press representative Phillipe Le Brevaux, a former LE MONDE correspondent in Argentina who was forced to flee for some negative reports he filed about the government's anti-terrorist campaign in 1976) were well informed.

Mignone's Trip--Rome

Mignone stated that he spent an hour and a half with Cardinal Pironio, an old friend, discussing the human rights situation in Argentina. They had great fun talking about La Plata's Archbishop Plaza who Pironio described as "a delinquent". Mignone also met for two and a half hours with the staff members in the Vatican's Foreign Office.

Mignone held meetings with a number of political parties in Italy, including the Christian Democrats, the World Union of Christian Democrats and the Communist Party of Italy. The latter he noted spoke harshly about the Partido Comunista de Argentina, saying that it was an incredible Communist Party without a worker base, totally dependent on support from the USSR. Mignone also saw the Jesuits while in Rome.

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Mignone's Trip--Paris

Mignone spent a morning at Quai de Orsay meeting with Director of Argentine Affairs Alemin and his immediate boss in the American Affairs Office. The French Foreign Office officials were pessimistic regarding improvements in Argentina and thought that the French policy line would harden, although they were not sure it would affect arms sales. Several persons in Paris had suggested that the expression of concern regarding Argentina would be expected to come from the European Parliament. Mignone mentioned that the Italian representative, Christian Democrat Granelli, was particularly concerned about Argentina. Mignone said he had a long discussion with French journalists, including the staff at LE MONDE, but that many appointments that he wished to have in Paris were impossible because of the French vacation season.

Mignone's Trip--Madrid

Mignone met with advisors to the Spanish King who confided that the king was debating not going to Argentina because of the human rights problems but sending the Prime Minister instead. Mignone said that he drafted a memorandum to the Spanish king detailing the reasons why he should not plan to visit Argentina. Mignone again met with representatives of the Spanish Socialist and Communist Parties and discussed the Argentine situation in detail. (Note: It was announced this week that the Spanish King will visit Argentina this fall.)

CLEARANCES: POL:AGFreeman

DCM:MChaplin

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